



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
BUREAU OF FORENSIC SERVICES  
**PHYSICAL EVIDENCE BULLETIN**



**CONTROLLED SUBSTANCES**

**INTRODUCTION:** Controlled substances appear in more different forms than any other physical evidence. The investigator should routinely expect to encounter liquids, tablets, capsules, powders, irregular masses, plant material, and nearly invisible deposits on blotter and other paper.

**A. SAMPLING AND SUBMISSION**

1. Only those items, which represent chargeable offences, are to be submitted for analysis.
2. Where the item is a large quantity of material, submit sub-samples only. Sample marijuana plants as described in 11479 H and S.
3. Citable offense cases involving marijuana should not be submitted until they are contested by the defendant.
4. The following categories of evidence will not be accepted by Bureau laboratories for analysis except when needed for criminal or administrative hearings:
  - a. Marijuana citation cases (less than one ounce), residue, and paraphernalia. Found property will not be analyzed (Bureau Order 86-3).

**B. PACKAGING:**

1. All evidence should be submitted in a sealed condition whenever practical.
  - a. **Evidence suspected to contain PCP will be submitted in heat sealed KAPAK plastic bags. Fresh plant material should never be placed in plastic bags.**
2. Evidence should be packaged in controlled substances envelopes (BFS-18). A BFS-17 Controlled Substance Evidence Report Form submission sheet should be attached to the outside of the submission container. Both should include the following minimum information:
  - a. Name of suspect.
  - b. Submitting agency and case number.
  - c. Date of offense.
  - d. Chain of custody.

3. Sharp or pointed objects such as razor blades or needles should have their points shielded with a protective material such as cardboard or soft plastic. Sharp objects are potential sources for transmittal of infectious diseases such as hepatitis and AIDS. Mark submission envelope "sharp object inside".
4. Money and personal property should not be submitted unless they are to be examined for material evidence.
5. Packaging should be sufficient to prevent cross contamination.

**C. EVIDENCE SCREENING:**

The Bureau of Forensic Services encourages field drug screening by officers prior to case submission. This often prevents analysis of cases for which no criminal charges will be filed for reasons unrelated to the chemical nature of the substance. This practice is of course predicated on the willingness of the district attorneys to file charges based on the results of these screening tests.

If pre-screening is accepted by a district attorney for filing purposes, it should be performed by the submitting agency prior to submission to the laboratory. Whenever possible, BFS laboratory managers should train local law enforcement in pre-screening and actively encourage its use. The ultimate acceptance of screening by the courts of appeal is unclear. The local laboratory and client agency should establish acceptance by the district attorney for a pre-screening program.

**D. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS:**

The Bureau does not normally perform quantitative analysis. However, quantitative analysis can be provided in special circumstances upon approval by the laboratory manager.

**E. EVIDENCE RETENTION:**

Controlled substances submitted for analysis will be retained by the laboratory during analysis only. When the analysis is complete the evidence will be returned to the submitting agency as soon as possible.